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ABSTRACT

This paper, written by a school administrator to parents, discusses parents' role in creating a positive educational environment, from providing a structured home life to volunteering in their child's classroom. The paper begins by asserting that a primary cause of behavior problems in the classroom is parent-child relationships in which the child, rather than the parent, is dominant, thereby creating students who believe they should be the center of attention. Society's focus on instant gratification and working parents' guilt are also mentioned as contributors to behavior problems. The paper recommends sure, firm, and consistent discipline, inside the classroom and at home, as a way to raise children who are well-adjusted members of society and who display respect and concern for others. The paper then offers suggestions for supporting children's academic success, such as talking to children about their goals and the necessary steps to achieve them, teaching children empathy for other people, promoting assertiveness rather than aggressiveness, and being a good role model. Finally, the paper discusses parent participation at school, recommending ways parents can approach teachers about volunteering and tasks parents can do for schools. The paper concludes by noting that teacher-parent contact not only promotes good will between the two, but in most cases promotes a positive attitude in the child. (EV)

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THE HOME AND SCHOOL CONNECTION

KIDS PRODUCTIONS' Parenting Seminar

Millard West High School
November 2, 1996

BONNIE J. PRYOR

We educators must remind ourselves that you, the parent are the primary educator of the child. We are the supporters of your efforts.

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PARENTING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB WE HAVE, ISN'T IT? IT CAN BE THE MOST DIFFICULT; IT CAN BE THE MOST CHALLENGING; AND IT IS PROBABLY THE LOWEST PAYING TOO! BUT, IF WE HAVE GIVEN IT OUR BEST TRY, IT WILL BE THE MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE OF OUR LIVES.

THE SAD FACT IS--ON OUR OWN, WE ARE ONLY AS GOOD AT PARENTING AS OUR PARENTS WERE, PARENTING US. AFTER ALL, THEY WERE OUR TEACHERS, WEREN'T THEY? AND IF THEY WERE GOOD PARENTS, WE PROBABLY HAVE IT MADE. UNFORTUNATELY, VERY FEW OF THE PARENTS WHO NEED OUTSIDE DIRECTION OR SUPPORT KNOW WHERE TO LOOK NOR DO THEY HAVE THE TIME TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT OR CAN'T AFFORD IT.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER, DON'T WE? A GROUP OF US WERE TALKING NOT LONG ABOUT ABOUT THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN OUR CARE. ONE OF OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES, WE AGREED,

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GENERALLY RESULTS FROM A PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP THAT IS COMMON TODAY. THIS, QUITE BLUNTLY, IS THAT RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH THE CHILD IS CALLING THE SHOTS AND THE PARENT IS MERELY REACTING TO THE CHILD.

AS YOU WOULD IMAGINE, THIS CARRIES OVER INTO THE CLASSROOM WITH THE CHILD THINKING THAT HE OR SHE SHOULD BE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION. NOW MOST OF US WERE RAISED UNDER THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE PARENT IS IN CHARGE AND HOMELIFE REVOLVES AROUND THE FAMILY AND NOT THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD. TODAY WE NOTICE FOUR YEAR OLDS COMPLETELY DOMINATING THEIR PARENTS. (IT IS SHOCKING FOR OFFICE STAFF TO OVER HEAR CHILDREN ON THE PHONE IN THE NEXT ROOM BEING RUDE, BLATANTLY DISRESPECTFUL, AND EVEN HANGING UP THE RECEIVER ON THEIR PARENTS.)

AS A WORKING PARENT, I CAN EASILY UNDERSTAND HOW IT DOES OCCUR. WITH A PARENT'S BUSY LIFESTYLE, YOU CAN OFTEN FEEL YOU "OWE IT TO THE CHILD." TO MAKE HIS/HER LIFE AS PLEASANT AS POSSIBLE.

A PREVALENT MATERIALISTIC CONCEPT ALSO TEACHES US ALL THAT EVERYONE SHOULD BE "HAPPY ALL THE TIME" AND ALL OF OUR WANTS SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY GRATIFIED.

IN MANY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THERE IS A TENDENCY FOR ONE PERSON TO DOMINATE. NO PLACE IS THIS MORE EVIDENT THAN IN THE CHILD/PARENT

RELATIONSHIP. WE KNOW HOW SMART SOME OF THESE LITTLE ONES ARE, DON'T WE? HOW DO THEY ACCOMPLISH DOMINANCE? OPERATING WITH AN UNCLUTTERED SLATE, THEY CAN EASILY FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION SOMETIMES BETTER THAN WE CAN! THEY HAVE A LOT MORE TIME TO WORK AT IT TOO. IF THEY CAN CAPITALIZE ON A LITTLE PARENT GUILT, THE JOB IS EVEN EASIER. AND, IF THEY ARE HARD TO HANDLE AT AGE 4, WE CAN ONLY GUESS WHAT THEY WILL BE LIKE AT 14.

CHILDREN WHO DO GET THEIR WAY ARE OFTEN THE LEAST HAPPY. IT APPEARS THAT WHEN THEY LOSE RESPECT FOR THEIR PARENTS, THEY LOST THE ANCHOR THAT A STRONG AND RESPECTED PARENT PROVIDES---SOMEONE TO FALL BACK ON FOR SUPPORT WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH!

BEING THE CENTER OF ATTENTION LEADS TO SELFISHNESS AND A PETULANT ATTITUDE THAT IS NOT HAPPY. OUR EXPERIENCE IS THAT THE CHILDREN WHO ARE THE HAPPIEST ARE THOSE WHO ARE WELL ADJUSTED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY AND WHO ARE AWARE OF AND SHOW RESPECT AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS.

HOW CAN YOU REVERSE THE SITUATION IF THE CHILD IS DOMINATING? I TEND TO AGREE WITH JOHN ROSEMOND WHO WRITES REGARDING DISCIPLINE. HE INSISTS THAT THE DISCIPLINED CHILD IS THE HAPPIER CHILD BECAUSE EACH DAY IS NOT A BATTLE OF WILLS. TEACHERS CAN VOUCH

FOR THAT. CHILDREN APPRECIATE THE SECURITY OF A STRUCTURED FAMILY LIFE. HE TALKS ABOUT THE NEED FOR SET STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR, AND SURE, FIRM, AND CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE WHEN RULES ARE BREACHED. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING IN SCHOOLS. HE IS ADAMANT REGARDING THE ABSOLUTE NEED FOR THE PARENT TO BE THE CENTER OF THE FAMILY, MAINTAINING A DOMINANT POSITION...WHICH IS WHAT THE TEACHER SHOULD ALSO MAINTAIN IN THE CHILD'S CLASSROOM. HE INSISTS THAT THE PARENT HAS A RIGHT TO PEACE, QUIET, AND TIME APART FROM A CONTINUAL CONCERN FOR CHILDREN. I AGREE AND I'LL BET YOU DO TOO. WE DESERVE THAT!

WE ALL WANT TO DO WHAT IS BEST FOR OUR CHILDREN. AS EDUCATORS WE HAVE A STAKE IN THEIR WELFARE SEC-SECONDARY ONLY TO YOU AS PARENTS. THE SOMETIMES UNPLEASANT TRUTH, IS THAT WE HAVE TO DO OUR BEST FOR THEM TO PROVIDE A STRUCTURED, DISCIPLINED, ENVIRON-MENT, WHICH AT THE TIME, THEY MAY SEE AS BEING TOO RIGID AND EVEN UNFAIR. IT DOES CALL FOR "TOUGH LOVE" SOMETIMES AND A FAIR, FIRM, AND CONSISTENT CODE. WE WANT "OUR" CHILDREN TO BE HAPPY AND CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF SOCIETY. WORKING TOGETHER WE CAN ACCOMPLISH THIS GOAL.

KIDS WHO DO WELL IN SCHOOL HAVE A LOT IN COMMON. IN A RECENT STUDY OF MORE THAN 270,000

CHILDREN IN GRADES SIX THROUGH 12, CERTAIN PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR AND ASPIRATIONS AMONG CHILDREN WHO EXCEL WERE CITED. HERE ARE SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT MADE GOOD KIDS GREAT AND WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP.

TALK TO YOUR JUNIOR HIGH CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR LIFE, GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND DREAMS. THEN TALK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN BECOME WHAT YOU WANT TO BE AND WHAT STEPS YOU HAVE TO TAKE.

TALK ABOUT THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS. PUT A STOP TO INSULTS AND PUT-DOWNS ABOUT ANY SCHOOL MATES OR FAMILY MEMBERS. ASK THEM HOW THEY WOULD FEEL IF THEY WERE MADE FUN OF.

WHEN YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN SEE PEOPLE IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, HELP YOUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THEIR FEELINGS.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO STAND UP FOR YOUR BELIEFS. HELP THE KIDS UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING ASSERTIVE AND BEING AGGRESSIVE. BEING ASSERTIVE IS BEING CONFIDENT, POSITIVE AND AFFIRMATIVE. BEING AGGRESSIVE IS HOSTILE AND NEGATIVE.

EVEN GO SO FAR AS TO ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS IF YOU HAVE

TO, WHERE ASSERTIVENESS CAN COME UP. SEE IF YOUR CHILDREN WILL STICK UP FOR THEMSELVES INSTEAD OF GOING ALONG WITH SOMEONE JUST BECAUSE IT IS EASIER. EXPLAIN THAT SOME PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT OPINIONS AND THAT IT IS ALL RIGHT TO DISAGREE WITH OTHERS; YOU DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE TO AGREE.

BE A FAMILY THAT SUPPORTS ONE ANOTHER. DEMONSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY AT HOME AND SCHOOL, BY BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR CHILDREN. LET YOUR CHILDREN KNOW WHEN YOU WILL BE OUT, WHERE YOU'LL BE, WITH WHOM YOU'LL BE, AND WHEN YOU'LL BE HOME. AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO TELL THEM "NO" AND STICK TO IT! WE ARE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU IN EDUCATING YOUR CHILDREN AND WE CAN DO A MUCH BETTER JOB TOGETHER. CONTACT US WHEN WE CAN HELP EVEN MORE. IT IS ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE CHILD, THE PARENT AND THE TEACHER IF WE WORK TOGETHER.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY. OUR STANDARDS HAVE TO BE AS HIGH AS YOURS AND WE HAVE TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER.

VOLUNTEER TO HELP NOT INTERFERE. TEACHERS WELCOME ASSISTANCE. SEND YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER A NOTE OR CALL THE TEACHER AND SAY, 'I'D LOVE TO GIVE YOU MORE TIME FOR INSTRUCTION. LET ME HELP. I CAN DO MORE THAN ROOM MOTHER OR ROOM FATHER. JUST ASK ME

TO VOLUNTEER FOR ONE OR TWO ACTIVITIES. LET THE TEACHERS KNOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IS A JOINT EFFORT OF SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS.

LET THE TEACHERS KNOW WHAT YOUR SKILLS ARE: DO YOU HAVE CLERICAL SKILLS THAT CAN BE USED TO COPY INSTRUCTION SHEETS OR TYPE CLASSROOM NEWSLETTERS? WHAT ARE YOUR COMPUTER SKILLS? ARE YOU CONVERSANT IN MACINTOSH OR IBM COMPUTERS AND VARIOUS PROGRAMS? TELL THEM. YOU CAN ALSO TELL THE TEACHERS THAT YOU LIKE TO WORK ONE-ON-ONE WITH STUDENTS HELPING TO EDIT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS, LEADING READING GROUPS, OR TUTORING MATH. OR SAY, I PREFER TO BE ON THE SIDELINES GRADING MATH PAPERS, CUTTING OUT PAPER BEARS, OR DESIGNING BULLETIN BOARDS.

YOU MIGHT EVEN ADD THAT BECAUSE YOU WILL BE IN THE CLASSROOM YOU'LL HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AND THE CHALLENGES THE TEACHER FACES DAILY.

YOU MIGHT TELL THE TEACHER SHE/HE CAN USE YOU AS A TEACHER RESOURCE MEANING THAT ONCE YOU KNOW THE NEEDS OF THE CLASSROOM YOU CAN PROBABLY FIND A BOOKCASE FOR THE RESOURCE BOOKS CHILDREN USE FROM SOMEONE IN THE COMMUNITY OR IN YOUR OWN GARAGE.

LET THE TEACHER KNOW THAT YOU CAN BRING COOKIES WHEN THERE IS A SPECIAL OCCASION BUT YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO MORE THAN THAT.

IT'D BE SMART TO COMMUNICATE THAT YOU WILL ARRIVE ON TIME, FOLLOW THE SCHOOL RULES, AND TREAT CONFIDENTIALLY ANY INFORMATION YOU MIGHT PICK UP ABOUT THE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

FOR YOUR OWN SANITY, YOU MIGHT ALSO SAY, "IF YOU ARE SHOWING A MOVIE DURING MY WORK TIME, I CAN RESCHEDULE OR FEEL FREE TO SCHEDULE ME TO HELP SOMEONE ELSE IN THE BUILDING.

IF YOU WORK, BUT WOULD STILL LIKE TO HELP OUT, ASK THE TEACHER IF YOU COULD ASSIST BY GRADING MATH PAPERS AT NIGHT OR CUTTING OUT TURKEYS FOR A THANKSGIVING PROJECT. YOU COULD OFFER TO HELP SET UP THE EVENING PROGRAMS OR OPEN HOUSES AFTER WORK. YOU CAN ALSO SERVE ON COMMITTEES THAT MEET IN THE EVENINGS AND MAYBE ACCOMPANY CLASSES ON FIELD TRIPS. DON'T OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE UTILIZING THE RESOURCES OF OUR COMMUNITY AND IF YOU COULD COME IN AND TALK TO THE CLASS ABOUT YOUR AREA OF WORK OR SOME OTHER EXPERTISE OR GIVE A TOUR OF YOUR WORK PLACE, THAT WOULD BE HIGHLY APPRECIATED.

THE BOTTOM LINE, PARENTS, IS : PARENTAL CONTACT NOT ONLY PROMOTES GOOD WILL BETWEEN THE TEACHER & PARENT, BUT IN MOST CASES PROMOTES A POSITIVE RESPONSE FROM THE CHILD, NO MATTER WHAT THE AGE!

Before I stop, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU THE ONE AREA FOR WHICH TEACHERS HAVE A LOW TOLERANCE: THE AREA OF CALUMNY AND DETRACTION. IF THERE IS A PROBLEM, GO RIGHT TO THE TEACHER OR PRINCIPAL. WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO ALL OF US IS PEOPLE, PURPOSE, VALUES, AND MISSION. AND ONLY WITH A COMBINED EFFORT OF FAMILIES AND EDUCATION WILL WE REACH THAT GOAL.

IN CLOSING, ON BEHALF OF ALL ELEMENTARY ADMINISTRATORS, LET ME SHARE WITH YOU OUR PROPOSAL THAT IF YOU PROMISE TO BELIEVE ONLY HALF OF WHAT YOUR CHILDREN TELL YOU HAPPENS AT SCHOOL, WE WILL PROMISE TO BELIEVE ONLY HALF OF WHAT THEY TELL US HAPPENS AT HOME!